

The Malcontent

Fall 1991

Weed Hall - Third Floor

Know More or No More

His consciousness started
when I walked into the room.
It's not that he had suddenly
awoken to his circumstances,
Like a sleeping patient awaking
to his own operation.
In truth, it was I who had awoken
to his circumstances,
His consciousness screaming to me
like an endless alarm clock.

I

My first hint was the three cages:
two of them empty, the last occupied.
These I could see from the hallway
as well as the look of dread
And apprehension on the sole inmate's
face. Well, this I noticed only
On closer inspection for I had
to crouch down level to
The bottom cage to peer in at him.
He huddled in the back neglecting
A piece of fruit that had been
stereotypically given to him.
Monkeys like bananas. This one had
hardly been aware of it.

II

It was then that I first heard him
from there where I crouched.
His quizzical chirp was soft,
really barely audible, but
The sound of it ran through my head
and seems to echo there still.
He was shackled in a restraining
device, the kind that allows
A person full and clear negotiation of
the subject without threat of
Reprisal - reprisal from a five pound monkey.

III

He paid little attention to me
Because while I was watching him
he, too, was busy studying something
Else. Something so bright with horror
that the agony reflected on his face.

My eyes, almost through their own curiosity,
followed his until I, too, saw.
And I saw the third monkey being
dissected under a local anaesthetic -
Maybe so he could watch too.

Ben Ide.

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(Untitled)

Isn't it strange how
the winter water begins to thicken
and grow more viscous
as I stir it with a broken branch
of autumn's dead trees?

It is almost as though
I can watch it gel to ice
and the steam that rises
from summer's humidity fractures
and dances in a brittle crust above it
that mocks the spirals
within spring flowers.

Too soon, it will come again.

But I will not be waiting,
Breathing hard with my mouth
stretched wide I will try to
see the smoke, saying
See, see! I am a dragon!
And frantically I will add
new slush, snow-ment, to my ailing friend.

Spring will find me lazying in the warm
at the back of the classroom,
fatigued from the anticipation of
tomorrow's weekend, still too far away.
And looking past the window I will
notice that the embankments
have turned brown where the plows
have collected their gravel, like so
many marbles.

Too soon, it has come again.

Ben Ide.

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Community Assistance Patrol

I'm sitting in a police cruiser parked in an empty commuter parking lot. It's ten o'clock at night, and I'm contemplating on whether to drink the last drops of a lukewarm cup of coffee, or pour it out the driver's window and hope I don't hit the town seal on the door of the car.

It's a hard decision.

I bought the coffee from the fast food restaurant across the street. I don't know if it's good coffee or not. I wouldn't be able to tell. I hate coffee. It doesn't matter how much cream or sugar I put in the coffee, it never tastes any better. I often wonder why I buy this hot, foul liquid. Probably because it's the cheapest, and only, item on the menu that's loaded with caffeine. I've tried soft drinks, but they just don't have enough of that caffeine "kick" in them. Over the years, I've learned to tolerate coffee, but only to a point.

I stretch my arm out the cruiser window and pour the coffee on the pavement. Then I throw the cup on the floor of the passenger's side of the cruiser with the rest of my accumulated trash for the evening. I watch as the cup bounces off an empty french fries carton, and lands on a cheeseburger wrapper, a testament to my good nutritional practices.

My attention is drawn to a car that has just pulled into the commuter lot. It's the Central zone car and it has stopped at the pay phone. Since it doesn't look good for two cruisers to be guarding the same parking lot, I drive out of the lot onto Main Street, and head south toward the shopping plazas.

The town is divided into three overlapping patrol zones; North, Central, and South. There's at least one cruiser assigned to each patrol zone. Occasionally, there are extra cars on the road. There might be one or two traffic enforcement cars, running radar or investigating traffic accidents. There can be a Rover car that can be dispatched to complaints in all three zones. And, then there's me.

I am not a police officer, although hardly anyone could be blamed for mistaking me for one, my being dressed like a police officer and driving a town police cruiser. I'm a CVPA, a Community Volunteer Police Assistant. I am on what's officially called "Community Assistance Patrol."

I don't really have a zone like the other cars. While I'm based in the business district, I can be dispatched to anywhere in the town.

The CVPA's handle car lockouts, assist at medical calls, direct traffic at accidents, and handle other non-criminal complaints. In theory, this frees up the full-time or "regular" police officers from handling minor complaints, and allows them to concentrate on more serious criminal matters. That's the theory.

In practice, the CVPA's drive around a lot and waste the town's gasoline. There is not all that much for us to do. A few of the younger CVPA's find Community Assistance Patrol boring. They want action and excitement.

I'm content handling lockouts and helping people cross the street. I understand that the real task of the CVPA's is community relations, publicity for the police department, and not crime fighting.

I drive south along Main Street, through the business district. It's quiet at this hour, only a few restaurants still open. I make a left turn into one of the larger shopping plazas in town.

The supermarket is just closing up, the last of the evening shift workers heading for their cars. I drive slowly through the parking lot, looking over the store fronts. I park the cruiser under a street light at the far end of the lot. This is the spot where my friend Kestrel "borrowed" my hat one night a few years ago.

I was on Community Assistance Patrol with a rookie CVPA as a passenger. He'd finished his classroom training, and now I was showing him what CVPA's really did on the road. He was handling the disillusionment well.

We were parked in the same spot I am now, when I saw a blue streak in the corner of my eye. It was Kestrel, driving her parent's blue Oldsmobile station wagon. Kestrel drove up and parked next to us, our driver's doors almost touching. We started talking about this and that, when she smiled a sly little smile and said, "Let me see your hat."

I was wearing a navy blue baseball-style cap with the word "POLICE" printed in yellow letters on the front. It was the same cap the regular officers wore on patrol. I didn't think anything strange about her request. I handed her my cap.

Kestrel put the cap on. Then, looking in her rear view mirror, she adjusted the cap carefully so that her shoulder length blond hair cascaded evenly out from under it.

"How do I look?" she asked. Kestrel looked so pretty. I told her she looked great, just like a regular officer. Kestrel smiled at me.

"Thanks," she said, "I'm planning on being a regular officer someday, and I'm going to be the finest cop this town's ever seen. Don't ever forget I told you that."

I told Kestrel that she'd make a damn good regular officer, and that I couldn't wait to work side by side with her. Then I smiled, and told her that I'd never forget this conversation. Kestrel smiled that sly little smile again and said, "I'm sure you won't. Well, I'll see you later." Then she drove away, still wearing my cap.

The rookie CVPA almost jumped out of the cruiser.

"She just stole your hat!" he said excitedly. I knew better. Kestrel was playing with me, and I was laughing inside. I reassured the rookie CVPA that I knew Kestrel very well, and that there was nothing to worry about. She'd return the cap to me later.

Kestrel looked real good in my cap that night, as she did the other times we were together when she wore it. I never asked for the cap back; I let her keep it. I knew she liked wearing it, and it pleased me that she wore it. Kestrel was my friend. I really liked her a lot, and I enjoyed being with her and making her happy. Besides, my name was printed on a tag inside the cap. It was like a part of me was always with Kestrel in her travels.

I was eventually issued another CVPA cap after I said that I'd "lost" the other one "somewhere."

The rookie CVPA who nearly jumped out of the cruiser to chase Kestrel was with me on another night when the car we were assigned to drive broke down on Main Street.

Each of the three patrol shifts is commanded by a Sergeant. One of their tasks is to assign cruisers, and patrol zones, to the regular officers and CVPA's working the shift. Sometimes, there's enough cars available for the new shift to go out on patrol before the previous shift comes back to the station. Other times, because of mechanical breakdowns, there aren't enough driveable cars available. The shift coming back in won't even have time to park their cars and turn off the engines. They'll just stop in the rear driveway, and pull their equipment out of the car as another regular officer puts his equipment in the car. "Trading" cruisers can be a noisy, chaotic few minutes.

There were quite a few "deadlined" cruisers that night, and there was only one car left for us CVPA's to use. It was an old cruiser, vehicle number 2501, the oldest and worst in the fleet.

The Sergeant in charge of vehicle purchases and maintenance swore by vehicle 2501. He thought it was a great old car, and he drove vehicle 2501 all the time during the day. Nobody else would touch it willingly, and most regular officers were annoyed when they were assigned to drive vehicle 2501. I hated driving vehicle 2501 myself, but not because it was old. It was the front seat I despised.

The Sergeant who liked to drive vehicle 2501 was a big man. He was over six feet tall, and had adjusted the front seat to fit his long legs. The seat adjuster mechanism had rusted and broken long ago, so the seat was now unmovable. I'm five foot three inches tall. When I sat in vehicle 2501 and put on a seatbelt, I couldn't reach the pedals or the controls on the dashboard. I had to perch on the front edge of the seat without a seatbelt to drive the cruiser. After a while, my back would ache. Usually, if I'd been assigned to drive vehicle 2501, I'd find excuses to park it in a shopping plaza parking lot, and then go on "foot patrol" in the area.

The rookie CVPA was taller than I was so I let him drive. I was hoping for an uneventful evening, but vehicle 2501 had other plans. The car was uncooperative from the minute we left the police station driveway. It stalled at every light and stop sign. The engine labored on every slight incline and hesitated whenever the gas pedal was pushed. And as the evening progressed, vehicle 2501 took longer and longer to restart. Our final adventure began around nine o'clock.

We had finished a car lockout in the South zone and were heading back to the business district. Vehicle 2501 was stalling every time we slowed down. The rookie CVPA was getting real tired of the car's uncooperativeness. He was starting to lose his temper.

Finally, I guess he could take no more. At a stop sign, just at Main Street, vehicle 2501 stalled. The rookie CVPA let loose a string of obscenities all directed at vehicle 2501. Then he restarted the car, and we turned the corner onto Main Street. We'd gotten about a quarter of a mile when vehicle 2501 backfired twice and went dead.

The engine would turn over, but it refused to fire. The rookie CVPA used up his entire vocabulary of

obscenities, including a few combinations I'd never heard of before. Vehicle 2501 would not start.

I radioed the dispatcher that our cruiser was disabled on Main Street near the historical district. You could hear her trying to suppress laughter when she acknowledged my transmission. The dispatcher was going to try to locate a mechanic from the town's maintenance garage and have him tow us back to the police station. The rookie CVPA put on the emergency flashers, and stared glumly at the dashboard.

There was a knock on my window. It was the man who's house we were stopped in front of. He had come out to see if we wanted to use his telephone to call for a tow truck. I thanked him and told him that we'd already used the radio to call for help. The man went back into his house. The rookie CVPA pulled the brim of his cap down over his eyes and tried to hide his face. "This is embarrassing," he said dejectedly.

"Let me try to start it," I said. We switched places. I turned the ignition key. The engine turned over, but still wouldn't fire. I pumped the gas pedal. No change. Then an idea struck me. I reached over and put the cruise-light into flashing strobe mode.

"Code three medical call!" I said, "Let's go 2501!"

The rookie CVPA looked at me as if I were crazy. I turned the ignition key. The engine roared into life. I put the car in drive and away we sped down Main Street.

"Tell the dispatcher we're heading for the station!" I yelled over the noise of the engine. Vehicle 2501's engine was racing, then skipping, then backfiring, all at once. We were picking up speed rapidly. Too rapidly. It was then that I realized that the gas pedal was stuck.

"The gas pedal's stuck," I said, a silly grin on my face. The rookie CVPA answered me with a short, obscene expletive. This time, I had to agree with him.

A car in front of us obediently pulled over to the side of the road in response to our flashing blue strobe-lights. We raced past it and continued our mad rush up Main Street toward the police station.

I could see the sign in front of the police station, the driveway just beyond it. It was getting closer, quickly. I started braking vehicle 2501 to slow us down. The engine raced faster, and the whole car began to shake.

"Hang on!" I yelled, and gripped the steering wheel. We were in front of the police station. I braked hard, the tires squealing, and made a wide right turn into the driveway. Vehicle 2501 backfired once and went completely, and totally, dead. The engine stopped, the radio and all the lights went off. I slammed the gearshift into neutral, and we coasted, blacked out and silent, along the length of the driveway into the rear parking lot.

The rookie CVPA and I had to push vehicle 2501 the last few feet into a parking space. That was the last time CVPA's were allowed to drive vehicle 2501.

The old cruiser was towed to the town maintenance garage a few days later. But that was not the end of its life. Somebody at the garage actually fixed the car and returned to the police station. The Sergeant continued to drive vehicle 2501 daily until that morning when his foot burst through the rusted, rotted floorboard on the driver's side. The ten stitches he received in the hospital emergency room convinced him that vehicle 2501 had finally outlived its usefulness. Vehicle 2501 was towed to the town maintenance garage, and eventually to an auto junkyard.

I drive out of the shopping plaza and back onto Main Street. There's another commuter lot behind the Catholic church that I include in my patrol area. I make a right turn into the church driveway, and head for the rear of the building.

I swing through the commuter parking lot behind the church. The lot is empty, as it usually is at this hour. I shine the spotlight on the bus shelter. There's a middle-aged homeless man who occasionally sleeps in the bus shelter. On cold nights, the regular officers often stop and see if he's all right. Some even bring food for him from one of the fast food restaurants in town. It's not all charity, though. Even homeless people have eyes and ears, and he has seen and heard a lot more than some people may have realized. The bus shelter is empty tonight. I turn off the spotlight and look around.

I am interrupted by the dispatcher's voice over the radio. The shift is over, all cars are to return to the station. I hear the midnight crew sign on, announcing the zones they will cover. I'm listening for one particular voice. The Central zone car signs on the air, a welcome and familiar voice on my radio.

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice a blacked out car pull into the commuter lot, and start driving toward me. I know what's coming. I close my eyes, but it rarely does much good. I hear the other car stop in

front of my cruiser. Suddenly, I am bathed in a bright, white light.

The other car is a police cruiser, and the driver has just blinded me with the high-beam headlights and the high-intensity spotlights built into the cruise-light bar on the roof of the car.

The other cruiser blacks out again, and pulls up next to my car, our driver's doors almost touching. We both roll down our driver's windows at the same time.

The quick, bright flash of a cigarette lighter from within the other car reveals a young woman with blond hair dressed in the dark blue of a regular officer. She is wearing a navy blue baseball-style cap with the word "POLICE" printed in yellow letters on the front. Without having to look, I know that my name is printed on a tag inside the cap.

Regular Officer Kestrel, six month "veteran" of the police force, takes a drag on her cigarette and playfully blows the smoke in my direction. We both laugh.

We talk about this and that, everything and nothing in particular. Kestrel's smile keeps me warm on this cool, autumn night. I'm about to ask her a question, when the alert tone from the radio interrupts my thoughts.

"South-one, Central-one, Medic-one," says the dispatcher, "Motor vehicle accident, car versus pole, possible injuries, Main Street by the South Village Green. Code two response."

"Central-one, that's you," I say, but Kestrel has already put her cruiser in gear and is driving out of the parking lot, flashing blue strobe-lights cutting through the darkness. I watch in the rear view mirror as she disappears around the side of the church. I hear her voice over the radio, cool and professional as always, "Central-one, church commuter lot, responding code two, South Village Green."

The radio is busy with messages about the accident. Tonight, no one is hurt. It turns out to be a "fender-bender", with minor damage to the car, and major embarrassment for the driver.

I drive leisurely back to the police station, another Community Assistance Patrol successfully completed.

Edward Hoyer Jr., April 1990.
In memory of Eliz. Palatine.
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Alien Encounter

The great ship hangs silently in the stygian void, its black hull near invisible in the cloud of dark nebular dust. Without warning, a dazzling light bursts in the distance. Too small to be a sun, but burning just as brightly, a flare lights up an area of the dust cloud. A second appears. Then a third.

Inside the black ship, three beings contemplate the bright disturbances in the dark, dusty night.

"Flares," the One muttered.

"Ours?" the Two asked.

"No, artificial," the One replied.

"Ah, enlightenment," said the Three.

"The water beings," said the Two, "The madmen called humans."

"We must welcome them," said the Three, "With all our hearts."

A thin membrane, for want of a better word, brushed lightly over a row of blinking lights of many colors. There was a momentary blur, as a ball of high energy particles leapt from the black ship toward the source of the flares.

"Hot time in the old town tonight," said the Three.

"What does that mean?" asked the One.

"I dunno," said the Three, "Writer having dialog problems again."

And it was so.

Edward Hoyer Jr.

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(Untitled)

J'aime la beauté
 Du jardin d'étoiles
 Qu' habite en son yeux,
 Et j'adore la gracie
 De la forme que mon amoureux.

Ben Ide.
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Success

Once drowned in a river of lament
 For success he yearned
 And that he earned.
 Now he backstrokes in an ocean of . . .
 Content.

Shaunda Holloway.
 © 1991, Shaunda Holloway.

Almitra

You breeze in and out of my life,
 Soft and gentle,
 Like a warm summer wind.
 Filled with joy,
 I reach out to touch you,
 But you're gone.
 And I cry,
 For I cannot touch the wind.

Edward Hoyer, Jr.
 © 1972, Edward Hoyer, Jr.

Love

Lying,
 as the case may be,
 is only another way
 to tell the Truth,
 because
 the Truth hurts,
 like knives
 into the heart,
 and I cannot
 stab anyone.
 So I lie.

Edward Hoyer, Jr.
 © 1972, Edward Hoyer, Jr.

A Note from Jack

Messy, messy,
 you left your
 life dripping
 all over
 my nice, clean
 suit.
 Shame, shame on
 you!
 If you weren't
 dead,
 I'd make you
 clean it up.

With Love,
 Jack

Edward Hoyer, Jr.
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*Never hit your mother with a shovel,
 If you ever do, then you will find
 That when you hit your mother with a shovel
 You leave a dull impression on her mind.
 Benideshave*

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